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ABSTRACT

To help ascertain leadership, guidance, and capabilities of the station advisor (those who foster the efforts of their student staffs), this paper provides an overview of programming elements discussing such topics as programming philosophy, general formats, and legal and ethical issues. It states that those advising the campus radio station can find themselves constantly defending programming, quite often defending radio programming in general. To add to the overall aspect, the commentary outlining and detailing noncommercial radio broadcasting is ever present. As the roles and responsibilities of those "in charge" of advising college radio stations grow, programming the electronic media entity will become even more important. Contains 16 references. (CR) Contains 16 references. (Author/CR)

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ASPECTS FOSTERING THE PROGRAMMING OF TODAY'S COLLEGE RADIO STATION: THE ADVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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ASPECTS FOSTERING THE PROGRAMMING OF-TODAY'S COLLEGE RADIO STATION: THE ADVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

For those advising the campus radio station, one can find themselves constantly defending programming, and quite often defending radio programming in general. Then, to add to the overall aspect, the commentary outlining and detailing noncommercial radio broadcasting is ever present.

As the roles and responsibilities of those "in charge" of advising college radio stations grow, programming the electronic media entity will become even more important. To help ascertain leadership, guidance, and capabilities of the station advisor (those who foster the efforts of their student staffs), this paper provides an overview of programming elements. Such topics as programming philosophy, general formats, and legal and ethical issues are discussed.

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ASPECTS FOSTERING THE PROGRAMMING OF TODAY'S COLLEGE RADIO STATION: THE ADVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE

> While some formats are perpetuated or are constantly being rejuvenated, most radio formats are constantly changing as the times and the audience change. … [Noncommercial stations] are structured as nonprofit organizations with the basic goal of providing access and service to the public, especially those groups that are typically overlooked by commercial media. (Adams & Massey, 1995, p. 189)

For those advising the campus radio station, one can find themselves constantly defending programming, and quite often defending radio programming in general. Then, to add to the overall aspect, the commentary outlining and detailing noncommercial radio broadcasting is ever present. Addressing public radio, Charles Hamilton wrote the following in his 1994 dissertation that provides a true justification for the medium, and thus college radio:

> **Why study public radio?**
> Public radio is a small and diverse part of the American media. The motivations for the existence of public radio are as varied as anywhere in the American media system. In public radio, we find stations that were founded to explore the science of radio in the 1920s, provide education and culture to the masses, to provide access to media for those who do not usually have access, to train future media professionals, to support political viewpoints, and many more.

Programming Philosophy

Programming at college stations "can span many music genres, from rock to folk, jazz to metal, reggae to rap, gospel to tejano, and classical to country. Spoken word poetry, alternative-perspective news, religious and

political programming also often find a home on college radio" (Sauls, 1995). This programming lends college radio to the appeal of the "open radio format." Basically, anything goes. Even the radio drama, the foundation of early radio, can be found today on college radio stations (Appleford, 1991).

In 1992, a study was conducted which specifically sought to analyze programming elements in public radio. Conducted on behalf of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (the entity which oversees National Public Radio) by Audience Research Analysis and Thomas & Clifford, 568 stations participated in the survey. Entitled Public Radio Programming Strategies: A Report on the Programming Stations Broadcast And the People They Seek to Serve, the "project's central thrust [was] to seek out underlying patterns in the key dimensions of stations' audience service … and to identify where these patterns are shared among significant numbers of stations." (p. 1)

> The basic theory of PUBLIC RADIO PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES is that *patterns of affinity exist among stations with shared audience service missions*. By better understanding patterns, the theory continues, public radio can sharpen the effectiveness of the service it provides to traditional constituencies. It can achieve economies of scale through new initiatives that are targeted to meet common objectives. It can reach more broadly across society through programming designed for listeners who are now at the periphery of public radio's audience. (Giovannoni, et. al., 1992, p. 9)

Many college radio stations put forth programming philosophies to help explain themselves. Quite often these ideologies are contained in station mission stations. For

example, *WSRN'S PROGRAMMING PHILOSOPHY* (Adopted 29 March, 1991) at Swarthmore College (as provided via their web page) postulates that:

> In order to maintain the largest possible audience, it is necessary for WSRN to provide shows that are not found on other stations. As a result, it is necessary to choose certain types of programs as more desirable than others. The Board of Directors of WSRN does not find its position to be one of judging the quality of different types of music. Rather, it is the board's responsibility to decide which genres of music are elsewhere unavailable. Therefore, students who are knowledgeable in non-mainstream music, or willing to learn more about it, are more likely to receive a programming slot than those intent on playing music that can be found on other stations. (http://wsrn.swarthmore.edu/96/philosophy.html)

Serving Underserved Niches of the Population

Overall, as with commercial stations, the underlying premise of the college radio station is to serve the community, whether it be the campus community or the community at large, but in unique ways often geared to underserved niches of the population. This ideal is consistent with the fact that colleges and universities, as are commercial broadcasters, are licensed to "operate broadcast facilities in the public interest, convenience, and necessity" (Ozier, 1978, p. 34). Studies indicate that this service component to the community is important (see Sauls, 1993).

Research findings anticipate:

> greater diversity in programming and target audiences - not within a given stations' program schedule, but among several stations within the same community. For example, even as a given station is working to focus its schedule on a particular "niche," other stations in

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> the same community are committed to quite different strategies - different kinds of programming for different kinds of listeners. (Giovannoni, et. al., 1992, p. 2)

Alternative Programming and College Radio

> The key to programming is demographics. Once you have ascertained what your target audience is, you have to program to reach it. Typically, you can compete with other stations with the same format or you can counterprogram to reach audiences that are currently missed by the other stations in your market. Although demographics are the most important consideration when establishing a format, other factors--such as public relations, promotions, presentational pace and style, personalities, scheduling, and the overall style of the station--greatly affect the success of the basic format. (Adams & Massey, 1995, p. 189)

"... [N]early all stations see their primary function as one of providing alternative programming to their listening audiences. ... More specifically, the alternative programming is primarily made up of three types: entertainment, information, and instruction" (Caton, 1979, p. 9). "College radio is as varied as college towns or college students" (Pareles, 1987, p. C18). Some stations mirror commercial radio, while others opt to develop their own style.

In reality, the entire concept of providing "alternative music" to a college audience can be questioned as to the penetration of the college demographic itself. Kevin Zimmerman, wrote in 1989 that "more high schoolers actually listen to alternative music than college students" (p. 67.) And so, it is postulated that while alternative rock bands are popular on college radio stations, the

college students themselves listen more to mainstream radio. "Some program directors argue that college stations with mainstream formats better prepare broadcasting students for careers in commercial radio. Others cite the nature of the audience."

> When looking at how college radio fits into both the overall radio market and specific local markets, it is tempting to conceptualize college radio as a monolithic medium. This temptation that should be avoided, however, because not all college radio stations follow alternative music formats, and college radio is not the only form of radio that programs alternative music. (Kruse, 1995, pp. 42-44; 157-179)

Noncommercial Formats

Since noncommercial educational FM stations are the most common licensing for broadcast college radio one will find most of these stations somewhere between 88.1 and 91.9 MHz, (within the section of the FM spectrum reserved for noncommercial radio). As a licensee, a "noncommercial educational FM broadcast station will be licensed only to a nonprofit educational organization" and "shall furnish a nonprofit and noncommercial broadcast service." (Rules Service Company, 1994-95, Part 73.503.) Then, even more recently, non-broadcast college stations have emerged. These include such outlets as cable only stations and the concept of internet broadcasting. Still, these stations usually maintain the noncommercial programming ideals.

Michael Adams and Kimberly Massey's 1995 book entitled Introduction to Radio: Production and Programming (as cited earlier) provides that noncommercial radio can be divided

into three categories: college radio, public radio, and community radio. Here, each is discussed for consideration by station advisors.

> ***College Radio.*** College radio stations dominate the noncommercial channels with more than eight hundred educational [sic] institutions holding licenses. These stations typically present *alternative* programming, that is, programs you probably wouldn't hear on other commercial stations.… Nearly 90 percent of college stations are oriented toward music.… Most college radio stations are programmed by students either as learning laboratories or school activities.
>
> Though music dominates college radio's focus, public affairs programming is also presented.… The important contribution of this programming is that it allows groups that are typically politically disenfranchised by the commercial mass media to have a voice through the medium of radio.
>
> In addition to providing unique music and public affairs programming, college radio stations have another primary purpose: to teach students about radio. Most college radio stations are run by students.… Since college radio allows volunteers to work with any and all departments, students are able to gain first-hand experience in a variety of areas, which provides them with a good "big picture" of the business of radio. (Adams & Massey, 1995, pp. 187-188)

It should be pointed out that even college radio stations must adhere to minimum operating schedules. "All noncommercial educational FM stations are required to operate at least 36 hours per week, consisting of at least 5 hours of operation per day on at least 6 days of the week." Concerning holidays, "stations licensed to educational institutions are not required to operate on Saturday or Sunday or to observe the minimum operating requirements during those days designated on the official school calendar as vacation or recess periods." (Rules Service Company, 1994-95, Part 73.561.) Stations not meeting these

requirements can be subject to share use of the frequency under a time arrangement from another licensee approved by the FCC.

> ***Public Radio.*** Since public radio stations are noncommercial and cannot compete in the marketplace with their economically more viable commercial counterparts, they are funded partly by the government, by underwriting grants from private corporations, and by listener support. It also helps to be affiliated with NPR because expensive, high quality programming is provided by the network, relieving much of the programming cost responsibilities. The main goal of public stations is to involve the community as much as possible in local, regional, and national issues.... [As opposed to commercial radio,] revenue received by public stations is put back into programming and operations because public radio is nonprofit. (Adams & Massey, 1995, p. 187)

> ***Community Radio.*** *Community radio* represents the smallest number of stations in the country, and it usually operates at a lower power level. Stations are economically supported by community groups, local business underwriting, and listener donations. Like college stations, community radio provides alternative programming through a variety of different formats. (Adams & Massey, 1995, p. 188)

The point to made is that no matter what noncommercial format choice of approach the college or university radio station makes, it usually can be found within one of these three types. In reality, quite often the format exhibits characteristics found in different combinations of the types. (Of course, you can't discount the idea of putting a commercial station on the air. Some college stations have been very successful in this arena.)

Programming Issues in the Community

To instill the notion that community issues are being presented within the context of public affairs programming,

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as mentioned earlier within the context of college radio, noncommercial stations are required to ascertain individuals in the local community, usually community leaders, to determine what topics are of current importance. This is where the ideas of taxation, employment, civil rights, infrastructure design, road repair, city services, education, etc. are derived. Within the station public file, a record detailing the "ascertainment" and programs must be included. Included in the station's "Issues/Programs List":

> For nonexempt noncommercial educational broadcast stations, every three months a list of programs that have provided the station's most significant treatment of community issues during the preceding three month period. This list for each calendar quarter is to be filed by the tenth day of the succeeding calendar quarter (e.g. January 10 for the quarter October-December, April 10 for the quarter January-March, etc.). This list shall include a brief narrative describing what issues were given significant treatment and the programming that provided this treatment. The description of the programs should include, but is not limited to, the time, date, duration and title of each program in which the issue was treated.[Effective May 31, 1988]. (Rules Service Company, 1994-95, Part 73, Record 3662/4424.)

So what does a station program to address the issues? In sum, the "FCC leaves it up to each broadcaster to determine which issues are of concern to its listening community, and how best to air programs that are responsive to such interests." (NACB, 1995, p. 86) This is where it is important for students to be up-to-date with issues in the local community. For students in a college town away from home this is sometimes quite challenging. Recommendations

are for the station Public Affairs or News Director to read the local paper and try to attend local civic gatherings, particularly City Council and School Board meetings in addition to Chamber of Commerce events.

Furthermore, those 10, 30, and 60 second Public Service Announcements (PSAs) do help in addressing your programming commitment in regards to local issues. "However, PSAs should not be listed as the majority of the responsive programming aired by the station." (NACB, 1995, p. 86)

Equal Time

Still today the question of "equal time" arises within the realm of programming. Basically, if one side of a controversial issue is presented, does equal time need to be provided or devoted to the opposing side or sides? Does the station Public Affairs or News Director need to interview all sides when addressing an issue? While the requirements within the Fairness Doctrine have been set-aside, in an educational environment (where college radio exists) it is typical to profess the ideals of presenting all sides. So, it is only natural then that the mores of "equal time" are sincere.

In reality, few in college radio management can foresee fighting the issue of "equal time" in court -- campus radio stations couldn't afford it financially and their schools may not appreciate it. But, the reality is that "equal time" may actually work against itself. There is a belief

that if a station is going to be challenged concerning "equal time" allotment, the easy way out is not to present controversial issues at all. Thus, the ideal of "equal time" has the effect of squelching coverage of issues deemed controversial. Therefore, while the intent of the Fairness Doctrine might have been to present all sides, in use it could actually suppress the coverage of any side by denying broadcast out of fear of reprisal.

Ethics

In the discussion of programming, the area of ethics must come into play. Remembering that college radio stations are programmed daily by college students, the degrees of what is right or wrong, funny or not, liable or slander, all come into question. These are ever present in the areas of news, music programming, dj chatter, public affairs programs, and entertainment/informative interviewers. Additionally, personnel and business matters fall under the conditions of ethics and ethical practices.

A section of the 1995 NACB Radio Station Handbook pertaining to ethics was written by Carl Hausman, President of the Center for Media in the Public Interest in New York, a non-profit media studies agency. Additionally, Hausman was on the journalism faculty at New York University, an author of numerous books about the mass media, and has testified before Congress on media ethics issues. He wrote:

> While journalists in the United States enjoy Constitutionally-protected freedoms, we realize that

> from a practical standpoint freedom of the press is not and cannot be absolute. There are various restrictions of an internal and external nature that combine to draw lines on how far a news organization can go in covering a story, or how much privacy must be accorded a subject, or how a wronged person can seek redress against the press. (NACB, 1995, p. 160)

He further stated that:

> The word moral is sometimes used synonymously with ethical, although morality usually refers not so much to philosophy as much as to prevailing customs. We have a tendency to use the word "moral" in matters dealing primarily with those customs and not with fundamental questions of right or wrong. For example, we would be far more likely to describe marital infidelity as "immoral" as opposed to "unethical." (p. 161)

A recommended reading source (See NACB, 1995, pp. 160-164), the Hausman piece went on to address the areas of truth, objectivity, fairness, conflict of interest, and sensationalism, and misrepresentation within the realm of journalism ethics. Concerning truth, he stated that it is "almost a sacred tenet of journalism, but truth is not always an easy term to define." (p. 163) Furthermore, "an 'objective' reporter is supposed to report 'just the facts' and keep his or her personal opinions out of the piece." (p. 164)

It is incumbent upon station management to instill logic and common sense upon the station staff. Good decision making is both inherent and teachable. These attributes will then carry over into making sound ethical and moral decisions in both programming and operations.

Legal Operations and Station Programming

A definitive aspect dealing with programming is in the arena of legal operations at the college radio station. The Station/General Manager and Chief Operator (quite often referred to as the Chief Engineer) are the individuals who are 1) most adept as to station legal matters and 2) responsible for the legal operation of the station. At times, the faculty station manager will place the legal operations of the station on the burden of a student program director or operations manager.

Keeping up to date on legal issues is the faculty advisor/manager and station engineer's responsibility. Referring to legal assistance may be needed at times. In addition to legal assistance when either starting a station or when making a major change such as a power increase, such expert guidance will also come in handy when confronted with on-going matters. A legal counsel whose specialty is broadcasting (known as a FCC attorney) is needed. Day-to-day lawyers and state attorney general's usually don't speak the "broadcast jargon." And, a FCC attorney can save the station and school a lot of time and money in the end!

Areas that are of particular legal concern and consequence for college radio stations in programming are: underwriting (including proper log entries), legal station identification, contests and promotions, transmitter operation and meter readings, the Public File, EAS-The Emergency Alert System (effective January 1997), payola and

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plugola, obscene and indecent material, drug lyrics, and the rebroadcasting of telephone conversations. (NACB, 1995, pp. 119-121) Of course, the best safeguard from legal problems is through proper internal station communication and education. Many of these issues can and should be addressed in the station policy manual, of which all station personnel should be required to read prior to commencing work as a staff or volunteer member.

Satellite Programming and the College Radio Station

Today, the use of satellite programming may be of even more importance in the future of the college radio as the incorporation of automated station operations expand to compliment live daily broadcasts. In 1995, the FCC eliminated the need for station operators in order to permit unattended station operation. "The Commission noted that in many areas of broadcast operation, automation is seen as affording more accurate and controlled operation than that performed by humans." (FCC, 1995) Here, such venues as overnight programming become a true reality, even when dealing with volunteer-student staffs, in that no on-site personnel are required.

College Radio Programming: Where Do We Go From Here?

Thus, as Gundersen wrote in 1989, "much of college radio's charm lies in its unpredictable nature and constant mutations. One fourth of programmers graduate every year. ... No [musical] genre is deemed inappropriate..." (p. 5D).

Or as Ken Freedman, program director of WFMU, the Upsala College radio station in East Orange, N.J., said in 1987: " 'but at best, college radio allows each station to develop its own personality,'... [a]s for us, we're dedicated to diversity -- we're specializing in not specializing' " (Pareles, p. 18).

Findings indicate that "individual stations will be more focused in their programming efforts, more discriminating in their program choices. They plan to devote more time to fewer formats. To best serve these stations, producers and funders will need to apply a similar focus and precision." (Giovannoni, et. al., 1992, p. 2)

As the roles and responsibilities of those "in charge" of advising college radio stations grow, programming the electronic media entity will become even more important. Leadership, guidance, and capabilities of the station advisor will foster the efforts of their student staffs. In sum, programming the college radio station must take into the various aspects which help to define the purpose of each individual station.

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